

Foreword

Four Seasons Provide the Foundation for Oriental Medicine

Japan enjoys four distinct seasons during the year.

The trees and flowers that have hardened themselves against the cold during the winter wake up to the warmth of spring, and new buds and shoots appear naturally. This coming forth of new life is one of nature's incredibly beautiful events. Human beings love spring in particular because energy that has been stored is suddenly released, and there is a true sense of liberation.

The season of new greenery that comes at the end of spring is not showy or spectacular, but in the sunlight the new leaves glow gently, and day by day the green color grows deeper and richer. This reminds us of the crazy enthusiasm of youth and the human heart contains a mixture of powerful strength and immense pain.

The June rains signal the arrival of summer. Under the heat and the sunlight, shade and coolness dwell together. Boisterous noise and stillness are close neighbors at this time of year, the warp and woof of summertime.

Fall brings the season of fruit, each piece a concentration of sun, earth, wind, rain and time, and our hearts dance as we participate in the harvest. Perhaps we are trying to forget the cold of winter that must follow.

But where is it that fall ends and winter begins? Looking for an answer, we realize that spring grows out of the winter solstice, and that nature shares the joy of searching for signs of spring even in the middle of winter.

These four distinct seasons experienced by the nations on the eastern seaboard of Asia add richness to the lives of people in the small island nation of Japan, and contribute greatly to a quiet and tranquil heart.

The Japanese people like to contrast human beings and nature, and to describe how we overlap and are identified with the world around us. The changes of the seasons profoundly influence people's lives, and although the Japanese way of thinking also has a major effect, it seems possible that nature chooses this way to tell us about herself. That is because the beauty and strength of nature come into true existence for the first time in the process of being seen by our eyes and described by our voices.

People who lived on the islands of Japan were attracted to the system of Oriental medicine that was written down 2000 years ago in China and brought to Japan from China through Korea about 1500 years ago. Oriental medicine helped Japanese people understand that human beings and nature are truly inseparable, forming a close relationship, and that humans are merely part of nature. Oriental Medicine made the people of the Japanese islands aware of the seasons, the self, and the relationship between the seasons and the self. Japanese people were able to subjectify nature, and this helped them identify it with the self.

The four seasons became clearly present within the Japanese people, while at the same time, the people grew aware of the dark side of nature which is Yin. Nature that includes this dark side is deeply respected by the Japanese people.

From another perspective, perhaps by working through a country like Japan, Oriental medicine can demonstrate nature within human beings and define the medical relationship between nature and people.

The transitions of the four seasons offer another opportunity to reacquaint ourselves with this viewpoint of Oriental medicine.

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